Schools across the United States and Canada are disrupting the adverse effects of poverty and supporting students in ways that enable them to succeed in school and in life.

In this second edition, Parrett and Budge show you how your school can achieve similar results. Expanding on their original framework’s still-critical concepts of actions and school culture, they incorporate new insights for addressing equity, trauma, and social-emotional learning. These fresh perspectives combine with lessons learned from 12 additional high-poverty, high-performing schools to form the updated and enhanced Framework for Collective Action.

Emphasizing students’ social, emotional, and academic learning as the hub for all action in high-performing, high-poverty schools, the authors describe how educators can work within the expanded Framework to address the needs of all students, but particularly those who live in poverty.

Equipped with the Framework and a plethora of tools to build collective efficacy, (self-assessments, high-leverage questions, action advice, and more) school and district leaders—as well as teachers, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and other staff—can close persistent opportunity gaps and reverse longstanding patterns of low achievement.
Few books on poverty and education manage to achieve what Parrett and Budge do here: Marrying an equity-informed, evidence-based framework for understanding why class disparities exist with an accessible, action-oriented approach for eliminating them.

If you’re ready to stop fiddling with simplistic strategies and embrace a holistic, transformative approach, start here.

—Paul Gorski, founder of the Equity Literacy Institute and author of *Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap*

This is one of the best books I have read. Every educator should read it to gain a deeper understanding of poverty—and how to disrupt the cycle of poverty that impacts communities across the nation. Parrett and Budge offer research, connections with educators doing the work, and practical strategies that can be implemented in any system. This work is an integral part of our school-based training.

—Tiffany Anderson, superintendent, Topeka Public Schools, Unified District No. 50, Topeka, Kansas
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Introduction: We Can Do This

We have much more to learn from studying high-poverty schools that are on the path to improvement than we do from studying nominally high-performing schools that are producing a significant portion of their performance through social class rather than instruction.


On a snow-slushy, gray day in March, where winter had lingered a little too long, we talked with the principal and a group of teacher leaders at Peterson Elementary in Kalispell, Montana. The hours of interviews flew by as they told us about the importance of loving their students, reaching out to families with empathy, professional learning necessary to meet their students’ needs, and additional challenges. From improving literacy instruction, addressing inequitable homework practices, to developing multiple strategies for responding to the stress and trauma students were experiencing, they described the collective commitment and action it took to transform their school.

The educators at Peterson are at once ordinary and extraordinary. They are not superhuman, and there is still work to be done in their school. What they are is courageous. What do we mean by this? They are committed to doing what is in their sphere of influence to do disrupt poverty’s adverse influence on student learning. We found other educators, in locales far different than Kalispell, who are the same. Taken together, they fortified our faith in the power of a committed group of individuals to accomplish whatever they set their minds to doing, contributed to our conviction that opportunity gaps can be narrowed (or even closed), and substantiated our
view that the transformational work of turning a high-poverty, low-performing school into a high-performing school, although considerably complex, is absolutely doable.

High-performing, high-poverty schools are models of the possible. They are places where the belief that transformation is possible has been proven correct and where students who live in poverty experience success. These models and experiences lead to optimism, hope, and self-efficacy. If you are an educator, policymaker, parent, or simply someone who cares about improving public schools, we hope you’ll heed Richard Elmore’s words that we’ve quoted in the epigraph. He is correct: there is much to learn from these schools. Even if you are not working in a high-poverty school, the same lessons can be applied to disrupting poverty’s adverse influence on learning wherever students living in poverty go to school. We are excited to share with you what we have learned from high-performing, high-poverty schools in the past decade and particularly from the twelve schools profiled in this second edition.

How to Use This Book

High-poverty schools do not become high performing by tinkering their way to success. A former superintendent of a high-poverty rural district described the district’s efforts to confront underachievement like this: “We could not continue to do what we knew would, at best, only minimally raise student achievement . . . and for only some of the kids. We had to fundamentally change the way we did business.”

We have written the second edition of this book, Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools, to continue supporting schools in “doing business differently.” Those who work in high-poverty schools can benefit from the information we provide here, as can anyone working in a school where an achievement gap exists between students who live in poverty and their more advantaged peers. For your school to become high performing and to close achievement gaps, you must apply the theories, research, and practical ideas in this book to your unique context. Throughout the book, we have provided tools to help you do just that.

Chapters 1 through 4 lay the groundwork for informed conversations among colleagues and future action planning. Although an individual can gain valuable knowledge by reading this book, we encourage all school stakeholders—administrators, teachers, teacher leaders, coaches, and the like—to learn together. These chapters provide information about poverty and carry the optimistic message that schools can and do make a difference.
Chapters 5 through 9 show how educators in HP/HP schools have built leadership capacity and collective efficacy, fostered the necessary learning environment, and improved learning. We describe how their actions influenced the school’s culture in terms of values, beliefs, and norms. We discuss what educators started doing or improved—you’ll see this in the “taking action” chapters (Chapters 5–7)—as well as what they stopped doing or worked to eliminate (Chapter 8). Each chapter includes a rubric that you can use to assess your school’s current situation and guide your reading and discussion.

We also include several inserts highlighting the practical applications of strategies that have been successfully used in HP/HP schools. Look for the following:

- **Uncommon Sense**, which presents novel approaches to problem solving. For example, one school started an after-school dinner program for kids who participated in the after-school tutoring program, which many students took advantage of before riding the late bus home. We call this out-of-the-box thinking “uncommon sense.”

- **School Culture Alert**, which signals or makes concrete and visible the values, beliefs, and norms operating in these schools.

We conclude with Chapter 9, in which we revisit the interactive, dynamic nature of the components of our Framework for Collective Action and challenge all of us—educators and other stakeholders—to confront the reasons we have not yet ensured that every high-poverty school is high performing. We present districts that focused on creating clusters of high-poverty, high-performing schools, as well as others that embraced a more unified approach.

**What’s Your School’s Story?**

The two self-assessments that follow—Assessing Our Ability to Take Action (Figure 1) and Assessing Our Willingness to Take Action (Figure 2)—will enable you to reflect on your unique situation as a school, a department, a grade-level team, a collegial cluster, or an individual. We hope these assessments will help you in two ways: by generating data related to your school’s readiness to undertake an improvement effort and by guiding your use of the resources and information provided in this book.

These assessments elicit beliefs about people’s *ability and willingness* to work with students who live in poverty, together with their beliefs about
### Assessing Our Ability to Take Action

Please rate each statement from highly unlikely (–3) to highly likely (3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I can name at least five ways poverty adversely influences students’ lives and learning.</th>
<th>My colleagues can name at least five ways poverty adversely influences students’ lives and learning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>–3</td>
<td>–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I know the percentage of students in my school who live in poverty and who, of those students, are underachieving.</td>
<td>My colleagues know the percentage of students in our school who live in poverty and who, of those students, are underachieving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–3</td>
<td>–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can name 3–5 specific strategies used by high-performing, high-poverty schools to develop the leadership infrastructure necessary for improvement.</td>
<td>My colleagues can name 3–5 specific strategies used by high-performing, high-poverty schools to develop the leadership infrastructure necessary for improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–3</td>
<td>–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I can name 3–5 specific strategies used by high-performing, high-poverty schools to develop a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for students and adults.</td>
<td>My colleagues can name 3–5 specific strategies used by high-performing, high-poverty schools to develop a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for students and adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–3</td>
<td>–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I can name 3–5 specific strategies used by high-performing, high-poverty schools to improve student learning, support adult learning, and “work smarter” as a system.</td>
<td>My colleagues can name 3–5 specific strategies used by high-performing, high-poverty schools to improve student learning, support adult learning, and “work smarter” as a system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–3</td>
<td>–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I can explain how educators’ mental maps can perpetuate underachievement.</td>
<td>My colleagues can explain how educators’ mental maps can perpetuate underachievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–3</td>
<td>–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I can list at least three counterproductive practices, policies, and structures that perpetuate underachievement.</td>
<td>My colleagues can list at least three counterproductive practices, policies, and structures that perpetuate underachievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–3</td>
<td>–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I can describe how counterproductive mental maps, practices, policies, and structures are confronted and eliminated in high-performing, high-poverty schools.</td>
<td>My colleagues can describe how counterproductive mental maps, practices, policies, and structures are confronted and eliminated in high-performing, high-poverty schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–3</td>
<td>–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I can describe the beliefs, values, and norms that constitute a school culture conducive to mitigating the adverse effects of poverty on learning.</td>
<td>My colleagues can describe the beliefs, values, and norms that constitute a school culture conducive to mitigating the adverse effects of poverty on learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–3</td>
<td>–2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2 Assessing Our Willingness to Take Action

Please rate each statement from highly unlikely (-3) to highly likely (3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I believe</th>
<th>My colleagues believe, as teachers, they make a difference in the lives of students, despite the challenges some of them face.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I believe I make a difference in the lives of my students, despite the challenges some of them face.</td>
<td>My colleagues believe they make a difference in the lives of students, despite the challenges some of those students face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I believe I am professionally responsible for learning.</td>
<td>My colleagues believe they are professionally responsible for learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I believe all students can meet high academic standards in my classroom, despite the challenges some of them face.</td>
<td>My colleagues believe all students can meet high academic standards in their classrooms, despite the challenges some of them face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I believe learning more about how poverty adversely influences life and learning would help us better meet the needs of students who live in poverty and who are underachieving.</td>
<td>My colleagues believe learning more about how poverty influences life and learning would help us better meet the needs of students who live in poverty and who are underachieving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I believe working more collaboratively would help us better meet the needs of students who live in poverty and who are underachieving.</td>
<td>My colleagues believe working more collaboratively would help us better meet the needs of students who live in poverty and who are underachieving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I believe our school has an organizational climate that encourages innovation, risk taking, and professional learning.</td>
<td>My colleagues believe our school has an organizational climate that encourages innovation, risk taking, and professional learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I am open to new ideas.</td>
<td>My colleagues are open to new ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I believe in our ability as a school to succeed in making changes, even changes of a significant magnitude.</td>
<td>My colleagues believe in our ability as a school to succeed in making changes, even changes of a significant magnitude.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I feel a sense of urgency about meeting the needs of students who live in poverty.</td>
<td>My colleagues feel a sense of urgency about meeting the needs of students who live in poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
their colleagues’ ability and willingness to do so. They will provide information about the gap, if any, between those two perceptions.

Although the questions in the assessments are designed to help you evaluate your school’s readiness to benefit from change, this doesn’t mean that if a school appears unready to change, it should do nothing. Rather, assessing readiness helps schools tailor their actions to the needs of their staffs. For example, if staff members score more positively in terms of willingness than ability, this would indicate a need to initiate conversations and professional development to build knowledge and skills. If they’re more able than willing to do this work, the school would need to address the factors that are influencing that low level of willingness so that the educators step up to the challenge of successfully educating their students who live in poverty.

**A Word About—And to—Our Readers**

This book is for every adult in the school community who is interested in better serving the needs of children and youth who live in poverty. These adults include those in the roles of administrators, teachers, teacher-leaders, instructional coaches, specialists, media specialist/librarians, counselors, coaches, para-educators, cafeteria staff, custodians, bus drivers, security staff, and front office staff. It takes everyone working collectively to turn a high-poverty school into a high-performing school.
Learning from High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

All over the country are educators who—quietly and without much fanfare—have figured out how to make schools better. Not just a little better. A lot better. They are ordinary educators in many respects, but they have found ways to marshal the power of schools to help students in a way that seems impossible elsewhere. They are transforming institutions into vibrant places of learning and growth—places where teachers want to teach and children want to learn—and in the process they are keeping the American Dream alive for the next generation.

—Karin Chenoweth (2017, p. 1)

Until early in the new millennium, little was known about how chronically underperforming schools with a high percentage of impoverished children could systematically improve. Efforts in the 1990s and early 2000s to improve schools yielded a growing body of recommendations, including correlates of effective schools, examples of successful schools, elements of comprehensive school reform, and a continuing array of curricular and instructional research on and analysis of effective classroom practices. But the specifics about how all the pieces fit together were, for the most part, just beginning to emerge in a comprehensive manner.

At that time, significant improvements in the technology used to keep and report state and district data began to sharply improve the availability of comparative data, making it easier to systematically identify schools whose achievement gains were showing steep trajectories. The Education Trust took one of the initial comparative looks at state-based achievement data on high-poverty schools (Jerald, 2007). By disaggregating factors of free and reduced-price meal eligibility, ethnicity, exceptionality, and achievement, Ed Trust researchers verified that in many schools, children
from low-income families and students of color were significantly outperforming their more advantaged peers.

What We’ve Learned

By now, we are fortunate to know much more about the inner workings of HP/HP schools, thanks to Kati Haycock and Karin Chenoweth, who continued the pioneering work of the Education Trust. Between 2003 and 2014, Chenoweth and her Ed Trust colleagues studied more than 40 of these schools across the United States, honoring them as Dispelling the Myth schools. She profiled these schools in two books, *It’s Being Done* (2007) and *How It’s Being Done* (2009a), and she continues to study these and other schools to the present.

Since our last study, the number of children and adolescents qualifying for free and reduced-price meals has surpassed 50 percent of the students enrolled in public schools (Suitts, 2015). More high-performing, high-poverty schools likely exist today than before and are more easily identified, thanks to advancements in data access. Such schools continue to be stark outliers from the mainstream, despite decades of studies demonstrating what it takes for a high-poverty school to become a high-performing school.

This book captures the results from our latest study; continues our mission to enhance what we have learned from HP/HP schools; and provides new insight into the complex, persistent, and stubborn challenge of improving high-poverty public schools. Schools that have met the challenge of disrupting poverty’s adverse influence on learning and sustained their success over time can be found in every state. Moreover, we better understand the pitfalls and challenges that beset schools that make significant gains in student outcomes, only to fall back again. In short, we know more today than we ever have about how to successfully engage in this work.

Our Latest Study

We began our current study by identifying high-poverty schools that had been recognized by national or state-level organizations for improvement in student achievement. Multiple organizations, including the U.S. Department of Education, state education agencies and departments, and public and private sector organizations and foundations regularly award districts and schools for excellence in serving high-poverty populations.

We identified the schools by analyzing various publicly available databases. These included the following organizations and agencies: the
U.S. Department of Education (Blue Ribbon Schools and Distinguished Schools awards); the Education Trust (Dispelling the Myth awards); the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP Breakthrough Schools awards); the National Center for Urban School Transformation (NCUST awards); and U.S. News and World Report (Best High School rankings). We also searched state departments of education websites and databases and those of entities such as Public School Review (www.publicschoolreview.com); School Digger (www.schooldigger.com); and NICHE (www.niche.com).

We constructed our own database from these sources and selected a sample of HP/HP schools for possible participation in the study. Schools selected had to first meet the following two criteria:

1. Secondary schools had to have a minimum of 60 percent of their students qualifying for the federal free and reduced-price meal program; elementary schools had to have a minimum of 65 percent qualifying.

2. All schools had to have demonstrated a pattern of performance at or above state averages for all public schools in their respective states in all areas of mandatory state achievement testing.

We selected an initial sample of 51 schools that met the criteria and represented various grade configurations, as well as demographic diversity (size of school, racial and ethnic composition) and geographic diversity (urban, suburban, and rural locations in various regions throughout the United States and Canada). We then ranked the schools by performance in grade-level groupings of elementary and secondary.

Next, we reviewed various state, district, and independent school databases, which enabled us to triangulate the data for the purpose of reconfirming that the schools we selected met our criteria. Although all 51 of the schools demonstrated impressive results, budget limitations required us to limit our travel, and thus we narrowed our sample to 12 schools that represented our grade configuration, demographic, and geographic priorities.

We contacted principals and superintendents to introduce the study, as well as to invite their participation. We explained our interest in interviewing leaders, staff, and other key individuals observing classrooms and the operations of the school, and seeking assistance in gathering additional data regarding their journey to becoming a high-performing school. Every school and district leader we spoke with enthusiastically agreed to participate and welcomed us to their schools.

HP/HP schools often welcome visitors, are accustomed to frequent inquiry, and are pleased to share their successes. In every school we studied, we learned that educators from other schools were visiting as individuals.
or teams either before or after our visit. The word gets out about these schools. It was great to observe the flow of visitors and witness the receptiveness of the schools to these visits.

**Meet 12 HP/HP Schools**

The schools we studied demonstrated significant gains on multiple measures of student success beyond achievement tests, such as graduation rates, attendance, student behavior, parent engagement and satisfaction, and post-school success. They have sustained their high level of performance over time and have been recognized for their success by national, state, and provincial entities. Geographic, demographic, and organizational diversity characterize the 12 schools. Located in urban, rural, and suburban settings, some are large schools and others are quite small. They include six elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools, one K–8 school, and one K–12 school. Ten are conventional public schools, and two are public charter schools. What follows are brief descriptions of each of the 12 schools, together with a snapshot of their achievement gains. This diverse array of high-poverty, high-performing schools pervasively and compellingly illustrates the viability of this work.

**Concourse Village Elementary School (3K–5)**

Concourse Village Elementary School (CVES), located in the Melrose section of the South Bronx, New York, leads the way in demonstrating that “your ZIP Code doesn’t determine your outcome,” according to the school’s founding and current principal, Alexa Sorden. The school’s extraordinary success results from intensive dedication and focus on the part of the leadership, staff, and students. High expectations for every student and the adult support that students need to get there dominate the culture of the school. CVES’s results speak for themselves (see Figure 2.1). Significant, sustained success on the New York State Testing Program (NYSTP) in English language arts and math places CVES considerably above both district and state averages and has resulted in widespread national recognition. The U.S. Department of Education named CVES a National Blue Ribbon School (2018) and an Exemplary High-Performing School (2018), and the National Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Distinguished Schools program honored them as a National Recognized Title I School (2018). Principal Sorden, a former reading specialist, literary coach, and director of student achievement, also received the prestigious 2017 Ryan Award,
which honors transformational school principals, for exhibiting exceptional leadership in closing the achievement gap in urban K–12 schools.

In the six years since the school reopened in 2013 as part of the district’s New School Model Initiative, replacing P.S. 385 of New York City’s District No. 7, CVES has steadily climbed to high performance. The school has a preschool program for 3-year-olds, a full day for 4-year-olds, and a full-day kindergarten through 5th grade. The school’s demographic portrait reflects a daunting challenge for any school: 95 percent of students are low income, 27 percent are students with disabilities, 26 percent are English language learners, and more than 15 percent are homeless. Nevertheless, Sorden and her school continue to outperform New York state averages by more than 50 points in English language arts and math. “It’s not about how smart you are . . . [it’s about] how hard you work,” shares Sorden in a common refrain that applies to everybody at Concourse Village.

Tenets of CVES’s success include close, trusting relationships with every student; a firm grounding in the school’s core values of integrity, perseverance, optimism, willingness, empathy, and respect; and a palpable love for kids that emanates throughout the building. “We really know our students, their needs, strengths, and interests,” explains Sorden.

Following this lead, instructional staff choreograph their lessons with a dramatic sense of urgency to effectively use every minute. Large timers are visible and used in every classroom by staff to manage a fast-paced blend of
large- and small-group teaching, coupled with individual attention to the
kids needing specific help.

The school deploys a number of instructional design innovations, such
as the five-phase process developed by Sorden, which she refers to as the
Collaborative Reading Approach, coupled with a blended literacy model,
positive behavioral and intervention supports (PBIS), looping, thinking
maps, close reading, tutoring, light music in every classroom, and a positive
environment for all students and staff, all delivered through an uncanny
level of collective teacher cooperation and efficacy.

Sorden voices passion to her staff about getting the kids what they need.
“We need 180 amazing days with our kids because they can’t afford any
bad days,” she says. The staff responds by working together to provide four
intense hours of targeted instruction to meet the needs of every student.
They know they have to be on the same page and work together as profes-
sionals to get there. CVES presents a system of consistent, shared successes
for any school desiring rapid improvement. Sorden expects teamwork and
collective efficacy: “I don’t trust words. I don’t trust actions. I pay attention
to patterns.”

And patterns—from high expectations; to authentic caring and rela-
tionships; to focused, carefully deployed instruction; to teamwork; to
timely professional development that builds staff capacity—are all in
place at CVES. Collectively, these patterns drive remarkable success for
the students.

E.I. McCulley Elementary School (JK–8)

Every morning, just north of the Niagara River and Niagara Falls in
the community of St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, Derek Harley, self-
described “proud” principal, reflects on how student performance has
come so far. “The staff likes the kids, and the kids know it,” he explains.
“Our No. 1 rule: We don’t complain about the kids. That may sound harsh,
but it’s a nonnegotiable here. Kids won’t learn from people they don’t like.
So we fixed that right away.”

In four years, E.I. McCulley climbed from being one of the lowest per-
forming of the 79 schools in their district to becoming one of the highest,
surpassing district and provincial averages in reading, writing, and math-
ematics (see Figure 2.2). More than 70 percent of the students’ families
qualify for public living assistance. Every morning, the school welcomes
all the students to a breakfast club before classes begin; bagged lunches are
also made available every day for students who do not have sufficient food.
Nutritious snacks are available as a grab-and-go throughout the day for any
student who wants them. “Our kids aren’t hungry here,” says Harley.
When Harley came to the school initially, it was a different place. Student achievement was low, the facility was worn out, the front office was unwelcoming, and staff members were constantly complaining about students and their families. Notes Harley, “We knew we had to build trust and relationships all day with the kids, and as we did, it all began to change here.”

The school also began a process of rebranding. They painted, they changed the school colors, and the kids voted in a new mascot. The Moose gave way to Jaguars. The front entry and office became a warm, welcoming...
environment. They started science, sports, and computer clubs for the kids. But most of all, they created and communicated a culture of caring and believing in their students.

The key attributes of E.I. McCulley’s transition? “It all starts with the staff,” explains Harley. “We have built an incredible group here that knows the kids so well, expects each one of them to succeed, and is made up of genuinely positive people. And we never could have done this without the total support of the district office.”

Differentiation became the way teachers taught, all based on knowing what each student needs. Literacy and numeracy became the priority. Staff got comfortable with daily collaborating—learning together and helping one another. Instructional strengths were shared and matched with student needs. Teachers were willing to move around and be flexible, and they collectively kept their eyes on the prize of learning. They saw they could serve every student.

One-third of McCulley’s kids receive special education services. The staff realized that if they used scribing or assistive scribing technology with those students, the students would do better on assessments, particularly if the scribe was someone the student knew and liked. “It really worked, and the students’ performance soared,” explains Harley.

E.I. McCulley has transformed into a school that the students, families, and community are proud to belong to. Known now as a high-performing school, a steady stream of visitors from across the province and border regularly visit to observe and learn. Harley gives all the credit to his staff: “It’s such a team here, really the model of what a team can do. I’m so lucky and fortunate to work with them.”

**Evergreen Elementary School (K–5)**

Following years of being the lowest-achieving elementary school in the Bethel School District in Washington State, Evergreen Elementary embarked on a journey to change its results. “We were on the verge of being closed . . . we needed to do something,” voiced several of the school’s original staff who continue to lead the school’s improvement successes.

Led by a committed group of teachers and a supportive principal, the school slowly began to realize modest achievement gains that moved them up from last place. But the team wanted more and, with the district’s support, attended the annual conference of No Excuses University (https://noexcusesedu.com), which culminated in a group decision to apply for membership in the network and embrace its approach to school improvement. A sense of urgency among staff to do better galvanized into improved collaboration and classroom practice.
Five years later, in 2015, Evergreen, with an enrollment surpassing 67 percent low income, became the highest district performer of its 16 district elementary counterparts, and it continues to garner this distinction today. Evergreen’s 2017–18 Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) results illustrate the effectiveness of their approach (see Figure 2.3). The school earned a 74 percent in English language arts (as opposed to the district average of 57 percent and the state average of 53 percent) and a 72 percent in math (as opposed to the district average of 53 percent and the state average of 57 percent).

Figure 2.3  Data for Evergreen Elementary School

Bethel Independent School District, Spanaway, WA
https://www.bethelsd.org/ees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students in grades K–5</th>
<th>530</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<td>Mixed</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELL Students</td>
<td>13%</td>
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</table>

Washington English Language Arts (SBAC*)

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Washington Mathematics (SBAC*)

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<tbody>
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<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>50.7</td>
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<td>55.2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

ADVANCE UNCORRECTED COPY—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
Evergreen has earned the Washington State Achievement Award (2012, 2014, 2015, 2016); the state’s School Distinction Award (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016); the Title I National Award (2017–18); and the National Blue Ribbon Award (2017–18). In 2019, the school was selected as one of seven nationally for intensive review as a model for ESEA and its organization that supports Title I-eligible public schools, those enrolling 35 percent or more of students who qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

Principal Jamie Burnett, fully credits the leadership and hard work of his “pillars,” a group of veteran Evergreen teachers who were in place from the beginning, for leading the way. He further acknowledges the crucial structural importance of the school’s partnership with No Excuses University, which helped them establish the Eight Exceptional Systems that drive their success: Culture of Universal Achievement, Collaboration, Standards Alignment, Assessment, Data Management, Interventions, Building-wide Discipline, and Character Counts. Blended together, these systems support growth in academic, social, and emotional learning throughout the school.

Burnett and his staff’s daily standards-based instructional approach exemplifies how their systems adherence translates into increased academic success for Evergreen students. Classrooms reflect increased rigor and expectations for all students as staff turned to a consistent use of student data to guide instructional decisions and support. Teacher-led grade-level teams assume a “no excuses stance” as they collaborate to tackle challenges and improve practice, particularly for students who are underperforming. The instructional day increased to extend learning, and the supports of Response to Intervention (RTI) were deployed and shaped to better help individual students improve reading and math skills.

Burnett and his staff attribute their sustained success to a change of mindset regarding their expectations of their students, an established “code of collaboration” among staff that translates to growing collective efficacy across the school, and a sense of urgency to do better for their students.

**Lillian Peterson Elementary School (K–5)**

“Welcome to Lillian Peterson!” exclaims Tracy Ketchum, principal for the past two years, beaming as we enter the school. “We’ve got a great school that really cares about and loves our kids.” The sentiment is as apparent in the front office as it is later on in the gathering of six core teachers and instructional coaches who have been at the school for a decade.

During this time span, Peterson Elementary, serving 358 students (74 percent low income), transformed from being one of the highest-poverty and lowest-performing schools in the district to performing in the
top 5 percent of state achievement averages for all Montana public elementary schools (see Figure 2.4).

Peterson Elementary is located in the community of Kalispell, home to 23,938 inhabitants in northwest Montana. Principal Ketchum is quick to credit her staff for making and sustaining the school’s gains: “We have a teaching staff that completely buys into our vision of ‘committed to student learning’—and that means every student.”

According to Stephanie Buzzell, veteran teacher and instructional coach, the previous principal established a culture of “keeping the main

Figure 2.4 Data for Lillian Peterson Elementary School

Kalispell ISD, MT
https://www.sd5.k12.mt.us/7/home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students in grades K–5</th>
<th>Low income</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>ELL Students</th>
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Montana Comprehensive Assessment System ELA

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Montana Comprehensive Assessment System Math

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<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>67</td>
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</table>
thing the main thing,” which was reading and writing. He saw the power in collaborative cross-grade-level and vertical planning and empowered teachers to do what they do best—teach. He used to say, “No kid’s going to fail. Kids at Peterson do hard things . . . we can do hard things.” These words inspired Buzzell and a core group of teachers to build a focused, data-informed approach that thrives in their system of shared leadership and serves all kids to this day.

Through the early years of Peterson’s journey to high performance, this core group of teachers collaborated; shared struggles, challenges, and wins; and grew together as a team. This collaboration paid off. Recently the district constructed a new elementary school and realigned elementary attendance boundaries. Peterson gained more than 180 new students, and their percentage of kids in poverty increased as well. The high level of collective teacher efficacy drives how the school sustains its successes (the Peterson Way, as it’s known) and eased the transition of the new students into the high-functioning school.

The trademark of a high-poverty, high-performing school is the embedding of leadership capacity, which enables the school to pivot as needed to successfully address new challenges. Peterson Elementary had to act quickly to address the challenges this transition required, many of which were associated with the social-emotional needs of the entering students. They implemented the fully staffed “Panther Den,” a quiet space where students can choose to check in for a few minutes or longer to get calmed down, self-regulate, or receive supportive help from an adult if they’re having difficulties. They equipped all classes with oximeters to monitor student heart rates, which the teacher and staff periodically use to monitor an individual student’s heart rate. And they make sure no student is hungry.

Peterson’s staff members communicate frequently and support one another regarding the needs of all kids. “Kids love Peterson because they know they’re loved” is a common sentiment of the staff.

That’s the Peterson Way and it continues to work.

**Parkway Elementary School (PK–5)**

“Parkway Fever! Good things are happening at Parkway. I hear about it all the time. The parents are proud of it!” exclaims Krista Barton-Arnold, principal of Parkway Elementary. “We’re no longer that school where nobody wanted to go. Our kids are coming back! We’re fully accredited!”

Four years ago, Parkway was one of the lowest-performing schools in Virginia Beach, Virginia, a relatively high-performing district. The school was characterized by rampant misbehavior, fights, poor attendance,
frequent retention of students, few positive connections with parents and the community, and little enthusiasm for the work. Of Parkway’s 426 kids, 75 percent reside in Twin Canals, a nearby Section 8 public housing development of 300 apartments.

“I had been an elementary principal for 17 years and then was a director of elementary education for the district,” explains Barton-Arnold. I loved the work, but I wanted to get back to kids and to those who needed the most help. I wanted to lead one of our most needy schools.” Superintendent Aaron Spence agreed, and Barton-Arnold headed to Parkway.

First on her list was forming a highly functional leadership team of committed classroom teachers, instructional coaches, and building leaders with the goal of reaching full accreditation. “It’s where the sausage is made. It’s the key to success. You can’t do it alone. You have to develop and grow as a team,” explains Barton-Arnold.

The team engaged in a deep look at student data, created a process for intensive alignment to guide instruction and track formative assessment data, and focused on targeting interventions. They met weekly, setting and monitoring short-term expectations and benchmarks for growth.

To address the discipline, suspension, and attendance challenges, Barton-Arnold drew a firm line in the sand. “OK, I’ll suspend those students tomorrow. But tell me what you’re going to do the day after that when they come back and they’re still doing this. Because I’m not going to suspend them again.” Barton-Arnold and the leadership team then led the staff on a journey of learning and capacity building related to restorative and responsive classroom practices. “We learned and practiced together,” explains Barton-Arnold. “We started morning meetings in every classroom; we supported each other in tackling challenges. Collectively, it made a huge difference with our discipline.” The ineffective in-school suspension program was shuttered, retentions were all but eliminated, and discipline referrals plummeted.

Barton-Arnold and her team leaders incorporated frequent learning walks to support improvements in classroom instruction and assessments. They took advantage of staff openings to recruit and retain high-quality, committed adults to join their team. Retired master teachers were recruited to return part time for targeted assignments in high-need areas, particularly math. High expectations for every student became the norm as the environment of the school improved (see Figure 2.5).

A new librarian transformed a seldom-used and badly outdated school library into a state-of-the-art Learning Commons. Through a process of “windows and mirrors,” in which students were asked if they could see
themselves in the collection and relate to the experiences in the nonfiction works, more than 6,000 books were replaced with more appropriate content materials. Other additions included a maker space and dream lab, which include creation, puzzle, robotics, and information centers. The school also initiated a full-day preschool, which Barton-Arnold calls a “game changer.”

Finally, as Barton-Arnold explains, “It is a harder job. It’s harder to teach kids who live in poverty, and it’s harder to be a principal in a school where poverty is high. You have so much more social-emotional stuff to deal with.”

Her best advice for high-poverty schools committed to breaking the cycle of underperformance? “Be brave. Develop a strong instructional team. Focus on small-group instruction, alignment, and relationships. It’s the most rewarding job I’ve ever had. It’s life-changing for the kids.”

**Pugliese West Elementary School PK–5**

Pugliese West Elementary School, commonly referred to as “West,” is one of only 68 schools across the United States that were named in 2019 an ESEA Distinguished School for exceptional student achievement. It stands as clear evidence that a high-poverty school—78 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals—can not only succeed, but also sustain its gains. Awards for high achievement are not new to this Ohio School of Promise (2016, 2017) and Performing School of Honor (2016, 2017). The school has also been recognized as one of the top 5 percent of all Ohio public elementary schools.

Located on the west side of the Ohio River, Steubenville represents a community like so many others, where the economic downturns altered the town’s once robust steel and manufacturing environment. “We’ve gone from six elementaries to three,” explains Lynnett Gorman, West’s principal for the past nine years. “With the mills closing, I think most of Steubenville’s population would be considered low income, as the middle class has faded away.”

Despite a shrinking tax base and economy, the school continues to thrive as a place where kids perform well in all tested subject areas. Principal Gorman credits the school’s success to a firm adherence to their adopted model, Success for All, and to its comprehensive approach to school improvement, embedded in West for 18 years. The program’s highly structured and leveled approach to reading and math, combined with staff-led, data-driven, highly collaborative efforts, have created and sustained a cooperative culture with parents and families, have improved attendance and student behavior, and have resulted in the implementation of successful interventions for students who require them. “It’s our approved curriculum; it’s in school board policy,” Gorman explains. “It’s how and why we’re able to do all we do for our kids.”

Effective reading and math instruction are the drivers of each instructional day. “We refer to our mornings as ‘holy time,’ which means a carefully designed 90 minutes of reading and 90 minutes of math for every student,” she says. This approach, steeled by years of support from Success for All and by staff members who have honed their instructional practices, annually guides students to remarkable successes in their English language arts and math achievement (see Figure 2.6).
The school’s staff also volunteer to join teacher-led solutions teams that form each quarter to take on sticky schoolwide challenges, such as attendance, parent engagement, cooperative cultures, and interventions. Some teams focus on students who are dealing with specific issues. Says Gorman, “The teams usually have multiple grades represented so they really think about whole-school needs and solutions. They keep our instructional coach and me in the loop, and together we collaborate to get solutions in place.” And those solutions work.

Pugliese West’s culture of high expectations provides tangible evidence that despite 78 percent of their students qualifying as low income, their
students can and do achieve, propelling West to its numerous recognitions and awards as a high-performing, high-poverty school.

“We build relationships with our kids,” explains Gorman. “We show them compassion, we let them know we care. And we expect them all to succeed. This positive approach has really worked for all of us.”

**East Garfield Elementary School (PK–4)**

East Garfield Elementary School, also known as “East,” joins Pugliese West Elementary as one of two high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in Steubenville, Ohio. Despite having 94 percent of their students receiving free or reduced-price meals, East Garfield continues to outperform state averages on both math and English language arts. Garnering a variety of recognitions for their sustained progress, the school received an Ohio State Board of Education Momentum Award in 2016 and a National Blue Ribbon School Award in 2017. In 2018, it earned state grades of A for Gap Closing, Progress, and Improving At-Risk K–3 readers, thus continuing their recognition as an A-graded Ohio Elementary.

Each morning Shawn Crosier, principal of East Garfield, greets the parents as they drop their kids off for the schoolwide hot breakfast in the gym, and he’s there again at lunchtime greeting each student as he hands them their tray. “The kids know we care about them; being sure they’re not hungry is just a small part,” Crosier explains. “Most of our kids come from the federal housing project across the street. A lot of them count on us for breakfast and lunch. We take that issue off the table, and the result is they’re ready to hit it hard in the classroom.”

And hit it hard they do. The comprehensive structures of the Success for All program drive East’s achievement success as they do at neighboring Pugliese West Elementary. East Garfield has the same 90-minute reading and math blocks, the same diversified intervention time, the same teacher willingness to help any child who is struggling, and similar positive outcomes (see Figure 2.7). The district’s motto reads, “Children are our business—and our only business.” And Steubenville’s system is clearly working.

East Garfield has transformed from a low-performing, high-poverty school to a high-performing, high-poverty school. The district deserves thanks for its support of and sustained effective implementation of a consistent, collaborative, success for all improvement model. “The kids do great here; they buy into our system, and it really shows in their reading and math and how well they do in school,” explains Crosier. “It’s not easy, but we can do it for our kids.”
Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools

Murtaugh School (PK–12)

“Ready, set, go!” Another group of four kids in red capes sprint down the middle of the school’s 50-yard hallway between three-deep throngs of cheering, high-fiving kids on both sides. “You did it—yay!” In this monthly ritual, staff and kids celebrate the K–3 students who met their Idaho Student Indicator of Progress (IP) reading goals. The kids get to wear their red capes for the rest of the day as the normal business of school resumes following the celebration.
Learning from High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

Located just above a steep canyon of the Snake River in the high desert plains of south central Idaho, the community of Murtaugh takes great pride in its nationally recognized, award-winning PK–12 school of 380 students. “Our community really values our school. There’s really nothing to draw people here besides the school,” explains Superintendent Michele Capps. “Almost half of all registered voters in Murtaugh cast ballots in our recent $2 million bond referendum. Other communities in the county average 10.5 percent voter turnout. And Murtaugh’s passed by almost 80 percent.”

Seventy-five percent of the Murtaugh kids qualify for free and reduced-price meals; the racial demographics are almost equally split at 49 percent Caucasian and 48 percent Hispanic. Most of the students ride the 30 miles of bus routes to get to school each day. The school has been steadily improving since its redesign as a PK–12 school in 2010, after having been identified as a persistently low-performing school by the U.S. Department of Education. That designation changed everything. Twelve-year superintendent and elementary principal Capps, along with the school and district, embarked on an aggressive improvement course to high performance.

“You can build culture and still have low achievement,” notes Capps. “But to build culture and have high-achieving schools, the key is to have really great people.” By 2018, Murtaugh PK–12 was named one of the two National Title I Distinguished Schools in the state for closing achievement gaps.

“We attract and keep the best teachers and staff—that’s the story of our success,” shares Capps. The school focused intensively on improving reading during those early years through implementing a blended reading curriculum, supportive professional development from the state education department, and Capps’ hands-on instructional leadership. “We don’t have an instructional coach, but we collaborate really well. Teachers coach one another, and they’re really awesome at it,” beams Capps. “If I walk into my two 2nd grades, maybe the teachers are teaching the same standard, but they’re doing it differently. It’s because of their ‘tool belts’—their prior knowledge, experience, or something they know about their kids. We just have good teachers; we let them teach, and they get results.”

Building collective efficacy, the highly capable staff have propelled their students to success, closing gaps along the way (see Figure 2.8). Their students outperform state averages for all schools, despite the fact that more than 75 percent of the students live in poverty.

Capps also attributes their success to having full-day kindergarten for the past 25 years—“way before it was the thing to do,” she says with a smile—adding that the state only funds and requires one-half day. “We also have preschool for all 4-year-olds in the district. We cover the other half of
kindergarten with general funds and have a grant to cover preschool. I can tell you it works. I can show you it works.”

Murtaugh School is small. One of the great opportunities of a small school, something that many large high-poverty, high-performing schools successfully emulate, is being able to deeply know the kids, and this can make any school feel smaller.

Murtaugh also excels in the next step of expecting every student to succeed. “This was the dream. It actually feels good to be on top of it,” shares Capps. “As the school’s success becomes more widely known, the
enrollment increases. Growth brings different problems, just a different set of challenges, but we’ll conquer those, too.”

**Stillman Middle School (6–8)**

At Stillman Middle School in Brownsville, Texas, multiple study teams are monitoring glide angles, trajectory, and design efficiency as the students launch their rockets over the athletic field behind the school during their 6th grade science class. “The kids just love the hands-on engagement,” exclaims Principal EJ Martinez. Coding for the 6th graders, robotics for the 7th graders, and engineering for the 8th graders will follow.

Stillman Middle School, one mile east of the Rio Grande River and Mexican border, is the largest middle school in its district. Each day, more than 1,000 students (98 percent of whom are Hispanic and 87 percent of whom qualify for free and reduced-priced meals) flood through the doors, to be greeted by a welcoming staff that expects every student to succeed.

Despite being a high-poverty school, Stillman continues to outperform both district and state averages on the annual State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STARR) English language arts and math exams (see Figure 2.9). Martinez, in his seventh year of leading the school, explains, “When we’re at 100 percent, then we’re good. If we’re not, then we have to keep on working to get to that 100 percent. We want all of our kids to be successful.”

Along with being the highest-performing middle school of the 10 in its district, Stillman also gained national attention for its students’ academic success, honored with the 2017 National Center for Urban School Transformation Award (NCUST) for National Excellence in Education. “We were the only middle school in Brownsville to get it, and we’re really proud,” shares Martinez. “The staff earned it by working so hard for the kids.”

The Stillman staff attribute their success to working closely as a team to deliver a comprehensive approach to learning. Teacher-driven flexibility takes advantage of strengths and leads staff to continually look for best practices to help all kids succeed. Every student in grades 6–8 takes an English language arts and a reading class.

“We really push reading here; the kids have to read well in math, science, social studies, everything, to do well in school,” says Martinez. An emphasis on vocabulary development contributes to student success in reading.

“Misanthrope,” this week’s schoolwide word, brought a chuckle from Martinez. “We’re in the southernmost part of Texas, and a lot of the dominant language is Spanish. We don’t pick small vocabulary words [in English]; we pick words that maybe the kids will never hear to expose them to vocabulary they’ll need to move on to higher education.”
The school also highlights universities, a new one every week, to help students better understand that anybody can go to college. Flags, pennants, classroom mascots, field trips, and a steady refrain of “You can do it—you can go!” represent a constant message at school.

Creating a bond between students and school is a priority at Stillman. Students are expected to participate in extracurricular activities—choir, band, dance, sports, chess, and a host of other clubs. “It’s what kids need, and the school regularly excels in district and state competitions in multiple areas,” says Martinez. The school helps students through tough situations through kindness—by caring for them and wanting them to succeed.
“More than 160 of our kids come to tutoring and our Supper Club after school before they head home,” explains Martinez. “You saw our sign out front, ‘No One’s Hungry Here.’ It’s all part of the picture here.”

Stillman Middle School exemplifies how a large urban high-poverty school can succeed. “It’s takes years to get to this point,” says Martinez. “It’s genuine teamwork. We all want the school to be the best that it can be.”

**Henderson Collegiate Middle School (4–8)**

Henderson Collegiate Middle School (HCMS), in Henderson, North Carolina, opened its doors in 2010, serving only 100 at-risk 4th graders. The school’s founding educators, led by Eric and Carice Sanchez, added a new grade level each academic year to become a fully functioning 4–8 middle school by 2014. A charter school, HCMS has grown to serve 555 mostly low-income students (94 percent), and it has experienced considerable success. It was honored as a Title I Reward School from 2013–16, and it was selected as one of two of North Carolina’s National Distinguished Schools in 2015. Since then, HCMS has earned a School Performance Grade of A (2015–18), placing HCMS in the top 3.6 percent of all North Carolina public schools (see Figure 2.10).

The HCMS mission is for every one of its students to successfully enter and graduate from college. Students visit at least one college campus every year. They enroll at HCMS through an application process to the school’s annual lottery, which is open to any student who resides in North Carolina. Student transportation is free and provided to all students, and nutrition services, available through the Community Eligibility Program, provide free meals. The school operates on an extended day (an additional 75 minutes); requires school uniforms; issues cell phones to teachers so they can be in regular contact with students and families; and asks that everyone—the principal, teachers, parents, and students—sign a Commitment to Excellence agreement on entering the school that outlines the promises each party must make to ensure student success.

The school has recently incorporated its extended day and mandatory summer program into a year-round approach of nine-week rotations. “After every nine weeks, we do two or three weeks off and have three or four work days to do professional development,” explains Director Eric Sanchez. “We’re always pushing ourselves to learn—that’s driven our constant improvement.” It’s the same for the students. The extended day, week, and year, coupled with enhanced access to teachers and staff, correlate directly to HCMS students’ academic, social, and emotional success.

As four-year veteran principal Frank Terranova, explains, “Each of our grades has a theme that connects our high expectations for character and academics.” The 4th grade focuses on team and family, the 5th grade on
kindness, the 6th grade on community and embracing diversity, the 7th grade on what it means to be a teenager, and the 8th grade on leadership. These themes permeate the daily expectations that HCMS staff hold for themselves and their kids.

Beginning with the core value of high expectations and a belief in the importance of authentic relationships, the founders of HCMS drew from the wisdom of organizations and models that have successfully served students in poverty, including the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP); Uncommon Schools; Teach For America (TFA); and Achievement First. They combined this with wisdom from practitioners and scholars to

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**Figure 2.10  Data for Henderson Collegiate Middle School**

Henderson Collegiate ISD, NC  
www.hendersoncollegiate.org

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<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td>ELL Students</td>
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### North Carolina’s End-of-Grade ELA Test

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<td>2016</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### North Carolina’s End-of-Grade Math Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: North Carolina Department of Education [https://ncreportcards.on-demand.sas.com/src/](https://ncreportcards.on-demand.sas.com/src/)
Director Sanchez explains, “We learn from studying successes and adapting them to our setting. We’re not trying to follow somebody else’s playbook. We’re trying to follow our own playbook.”

HCMS deploys a data-driven approach to instructional coaching and aggressively monitors all teaching and learning. “Others choose to spend a lot of money on other things, and frankly we don’t have those things because we’ve decided to spend that on coaches,” shares Sanchez. The school has developed a sophisticated instructional coaching model where staff members can partner with subject-matter experts daily and weekly. “Our teachers grow and improve, as do their students,” says Sanchez.

The Henderson Collegiate Way finds Principal Terranova greeting every student as he or she enters the building every morning. He knows almost each of the 555 students by name, encouraging them to work hard and have a great day. “Our job is to help kids, first and foremost, become good people,” he adds.

HCMS leaders and staff know their students can and will achieve at the level necessary to go on to succeed in college. The school clearly demonstrates that a poverty rate exceeding 90 percent is not a barrier to what kids can accomplish.

Pass Christian High School (9–12)

Located on the southwestern Gulf Coast of Mississippi, Pass Christian High School (PCHS) demonstrates that a high-poverty high school can indeed sustain high performance. Despite being virtually destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the school and its district emerged from the destruction and reestablished their future vision as “Committed to Excellence”; they made it their mission “to empower all students to be college-critical thinkers, and contributing citizens.” PCHS continues to embody these goals in all that it does. And its journey demonstrates remarkable success.

Explains Robyn Killebrew, who was the school’s principal for five years and recently moved into the position of assistant superintendent, “We really know every one of our kids and care deeply about their experience here . . . and they respond.” PCHS, a Title I school with more than 62 percent of its students qualifying for free or reduced-priced meals, now significantly outperforms state averages in English language arts and math (see Figure 2.11) and has established its own “Pass High Way.”

Starting with a schoolwide belief that every student can and will succeed, the adults who staff the school attribute their success to the close relationships they maintain with students and families and to a vertically
aligned curriculum coupled with a standards-based instructional process that deploys 3-6-9–week common assessments. “Those assessments were all made in house, and it took about a full year to complete,” says Killebrew. “We tweaked them over the first couple of years, but now we have them in good shape. They really help teachers identify how students are doing and who needs help.”

The school places all entering 9th graders into a highly effective freshman academy that launches the students on a path to success. The students are surrounded by caring, highly competent teachers who mold them into
a cooperative, confident group. All staff are committed to providing extra help to the students who need it. “We don’t have a single teacher who won’t stay after school any day to help a student who is struggling. And that makes a huge difference in a high school,” Killebrew explains.

PCHS continues to be nationally recognized, receiving multiple awards over the years, including being named a U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School of Excellence (2005) and receiving both a Lighthouse School Leader Award (2012) and an Education Trust Dispelling the Myth Award (2013). The school was ranked by *U.S. News and World Report* as the No. 1 high school in Mississippi for 2006–10. Principal Killebrew was also recognized with the state’s Milken Educator Award (2018). During the 2017–18 academic year, the school’s graduating class garnered more than $21 million in college scholarships to postsecondary institutions.

When Killebrew was asked to name the topmost factor in the high school’s success, she responded, “The 3–6–9 assessments and freshman academy have been game changers, but it’s really all about the relationships we have with our students and with one another. We’re like a big family. That’s what makes it happen here.”

A student passed us a note during our visit to PCHS. It read,

Our secret is, we as a school have a mission that we want and need to accomplish. And we all know what it takes to achieve the mission. We set goals as students, teachers, administrators, janitors, and even the lunch ladies. It was never easy, but with the support of our peers, teachers, and even our community, we built up a program that I am proud to be a part of and represent every day.

**The Preuss School UC San Diego (6–12)**

The Preuss School was created to enroll, serve, and graduate first-generation college-going low-income students. Chartered by the San Diego Unified School District, the school operates on the University of California San Diego campus in La Jolla. Preuss School, now in its 20th year, continues to outperform both California and its local district in both math and English language arts on state test scores, despite having a student body that is 95 percent low-income (see Figure 2.12).

This high-performing middle and high school public charter school provides bussing for its 840 students, the majority of whom reside in the inner city of San Diego. To attend Preuss, a student’s family must qualify as low income and the student must be the first generation in his or her family who could graduate from a four-year college. Students enter through an annual application process followed by a lottery.

“There are no silver bullets here,” explains Scott Barton, Preuss’s principal and one of the school’s founding faculty members. The school focuses on four overarching goals: bridging the gap for underserved students, offering a rigorous curriculum, providing wraparound services for all students, and ensuring successful transitions into graduation and beyond, into college. “Our formula is actually pretty simple,” notes Barton. “High expectations for every student and a commitment from all adults here to get them to graduation and into college, a high-quality staff who work incredibly hard, weekly professional development that pushes us to get better, and a school culture where academics are perceived as cool by the kids.”

The school provides all students with a rigorous, detracked curriculum designed to meet and exceed the admission requirements of the University of California system. All students take several advanced placement (AP) classes during their high school years, complete portfolios, and participate in SAT prep to get ready for their exams. The school provides wraparound services—counseling, mentoring, tutoring, and advising supports—to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of each student.

Preuss extends the day and week to maximize learning. The school has an eight-block schedule and multiple after-school academic supports (e.g., tutoring and project/homework help), along with clubs and enrichments, such as the increasingly popular robotics team, sports programs, and a Saturday Enrichment Academy. A longer school year helps students prepare for graduation (which more than 95 percent of students accomplish on time) and get accepted to colleges, universities, and other four-year institutions of higher learning (almost all students do so).

“A major key to student success is our advisory program,” explains Barton. Every Preuss student participates in an advisory class. A faculty member guides each class through their yearly load of coursework and assessments; promotes student awareness of current societal issues; encourages KBAR (kick back and read); and helps students with their social-emotional needs. Advisors focus the 90-minute sessions around the school’s primary goals of having students graduate and get accepted into college. Advisoryes at Preuss connect students with a caring adult who forms a family-like bond with each 6th grade class and accompanies them through their seven years to graduation.
“Last year, 100 percent of our graduates were accepted to four-year colleges,” shares Barton. “We surround our kids with support to help them rise to our expectations. And they do it every year. We’re a pretty good school!”

Validating and Refining the Framework for Action

During visits to these schools, we listened as educators—administrators, teachers, professional and classified staff, and other key individuals—described the actions they believed had resulted in their school’s
improvements, and we looked for evidence that confirmed or refuted the leadership concepts represented in our framework. We reviewed data from school improvement plans, district and state report cards, state and district websites, school evaluations, and other sources.

Our exploration into the function of leadership in the 12 schools enabled us to again confirm our framework. The elements in the Action section of our framework—building leadership capacity and collective efficacy; fostering a healthy, safe, and supportive learning environment; and focusing on student, professional, and system learning—indeed appeared vital to success.

As a result of our visits to these schools, we added two characteristics to our framework that were clearly drivers of success. They are (1) a searing sense of urgency to improve; and (2) the ubiquitous collective efficacy of adults, particularly teachers. Each characteristic was prominent in each school.

We considered not only leaders’ and educators’ explicit statements of actions taken and the apparent results, but also their perceptions of changes in the culture of the school (that is, in norms, beliefs, and values). In our initial conceptualization of the role of leadership in shaping the culture in HP/HP schools, we included the value that educators placed on relationships, their belief that students in poverty could be held to high expectations, and their courage and will to take action.

Schools like those we visited have unequivocally demonstrated that the barriers posed by poverty to learning and achievement can be overcome. Yet poverty presents a daunting set of circumstances that can overwhelm even the best-intentioned educators in their efforts to teach kids who live within its influence. High-performing, high-poverty schools begin their efforts by learning about the unique needs of their students who live in poverty and those of their families, something we will look at next, in Chapter 3.
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About the Authors

**William H. Parrett** has received international recognition for his work in school improvement related to children and adolescents who live in poverty. He has coauthored 10 books; three recent books are best sellers. The award-winning and best-selling book, *Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools*, with Kathleen Budge, has provided a Framework for Action that has been adopted throughout the United States to guide lasting improvement and student success in high-poverty schools. He is also the coauthor, with Kathleen Budge, of *Disrupting Poverty: Five Powerful Classroom Practices*. As director of the Boise State University Center for School Improvement and Policy Studies (since 1996), Parrett coordinates funded projects and school improvement initiatives that currently exceed $5 million a year and in excess of $80 million over the past 23 years. He is a frequent speaker at international and national events and his work with state and regional educational organizations, districts, and schools spans 44 states and 11 nations. Throughout his career, Parrett has worked to improve the educational achievement of all children and youth, particularly those less advantaged. These efforts have positively affected the lives of thousands of young people, many of whom live in poverty. Contact Parrett by e-mail at wparret@boisestate.edu or follow him on Twitter at @WHParrett.

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Related ASCD Resources: Educating Students Living in Poverty

At the time of publication, the following resources were available (ASCD stock numbers in parentheses).

**Online Course**
Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools (Reimagined) [PDO]
with Kathleen M. Budge, William H. Parrett, and Margo Healy (#PD16OC006S)

**DVDs**
Disrupting Poverty in the Elementary School Classroom (DVD) with William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge (#616044)
Disrupting Poverty in the Secondary School Classroom (DVD) with William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge (#616071)

**Print Products**
*Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* (Quick Reference Guide), by Kristin Souers and Pete Hall (#QRG118054)
*Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind: Practical Strategies for Raising Achievement*, by Eric Jensen (#113001)
*Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom*, by Kristin Souers and Pete Hall (#116014)
*The Handbook for Poor Students, Rich Teaching*, by Eric Jensen (#319078)
*Relationship, Responsibility, and Regulation: Trauma-Invested Practices for Fostering Resilient Learners*, by Kristin Van Marter Souers and Pete Hall (#119027)
*Teaching Students from Poverty* (Quick Reference Guide), by Eric Jensen (#QRG118041)
*Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It*, by Eric Jensen (#109074)
*Your Students, My Students, Our Students: Rethinking Equitable and Inclusive Classrooms*, by Lee Ann Jung, Nancy Frey, Douglas Fisher, and Julie Kroener (#119019)

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